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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Production and Marketing Administration

FOOD IN 1946. ^A

Remarks of William C. Ockey, Associate Director of Food Distribution Programs Branch, before New York State Joint Legislative Committee on Nutrition--New York City, December 12, 1945 (AM)

When I spoke to this group in early December a year ago, we were about to enter a period when our civilian food supply would, for the first time, feel the pinch of a long war.

During most of 1944 our food supply had been abundant and, when compared with the diets of many of our fighting Allies, it was luxurious. Supplies of meat, other than the better grades of beef and lamb, were relatively abundant. We ate eggs and more eggs--fried, scrambled, in omelets, in custards--we colored them for the kids at Easter--but still we had too many eggs. The unusually large slaughter of hogs in early 1944 increased our lard supplies until cries of "surplus" became quite common. Victory garden production supplemented the plentiful supplies of fresh vegetables.

Late in 1944, however, it became apparent that we did not have an inexhaustible supply of food. Fewer hogs would be coming to market from the smaller 1944 Spring pig crop, thereby reducing our 1945 supplies of meat and fats. The drought, which had played havoc with the crops in the Southern Hemisphere, lingered in the Caribbean and the prospect for another big sugar crop dimmed. Butter production was declining and the decline would continue until we entered the flush milk production season in the early months of 1945.

At the same time, the high-priority war requirements for food increased. More food for our fighting men in Europe--more food to fill the pipelines for the coming all-out offensive in the Pacific--food for the French Army fighting

with us in Europe—food for the starving in areas liberated from Nazi domination. Yes, even food for the swelling ranks of war prisoners.

For U. S. civilians, the feast was over. But we knew there would be no famine in 1945. To be sure, civilians would find the 1945 food supply less interesting, but they would continue to be well fed.

I need but briefly review the 1945 food situation prior to V-J Day. The large metropolitan areas distant from producing centers, as is this city, were the first to feel the reduction in supplies of meats, poultry, and fats. Women waited for hours for the supply truck to arrive at the meat markets. To the New York City housewife, a frying chicken was held in the same high esteem as a pair of Nylons. By late Spring, eggs had joined a growing group of scarce items. For many, the baconless breakfast soon became the baconless, eggless, butterless breakfast. The food problems of the poor civilian became a favorite topic for newspaper cartoonists. Yet, while shortages of the things we wanted most were unpleasant and made meal planning difficult, we were not suffering.

Fluid milk supplies were adequate; cereal products were abundant; fresh fruits were plentiful; and fresh vegetables were available in great variety. Along with these supplies, we had some meat, some cheese, some butter, and an occasional chicken dinner to round out our diets.

An immediate improvement in civilian food supplies occurred when Japan capitulated. Now, only 4 months after V-J Day, only sugar is rationed and numerous other controls, such as those prohibiting the sale of whipping cream, have been eliminated.

In summarizing our wartime experiences, a report on food consumption levels, recently issued by the Combined Food Board, shows that the wartime diets available to the United States civilians were nutritionally superior to those of the

years immediately preceding the war. Compared with our diets in the years 1935-39, our 1945 food supply contained more protein, more calcium, more iron, and more of the A, B, and C vitamins. Furthermore, this more nutritious, though I admit, at times, less interesting, diet was more uniformly distributed among our population as a result of increased incomes, rationing, and controlled prices. During the war years, U. S. civilians ate more food, and the quality of the diet was such to maintain our civilian population at a high level of productive efficiency and health.

That--very briefly--is the food picture of the years just past. Now, what is in store for 1946?

First, let us look at our productive plant. Our wartime record of food production is no less amazing nor less important to our victory than the records we set in the building of tanks, planes, and ships. The 1942 food production record was surpassed in 1943 and again in 1944. Food production in 1945 has been maintained at the 1944 level--almost one-third greater than in prewar years. And this was done with fewer workers and with machinery badly in need of repairs or replacement! It was a tough assignment and American farmers can well be proud of the job they did. Certainly the war has made one fact crystal clear; American farmers can produce plenty of food.

The Production Goals suggested for 1946 recognize the continued need for almost unlimited supplies of American food. While military requirements for food will be greatly reduced, other demands will tend to compensate for this reduction. There are many changes in a man's life when he sheds his uniform and once more becomes a civilian, but one thing doesn't change. He still gets hungry and he still eats. As our young men and women return to civilian life our aggregate civilian food demand will increase. And while we civilians who

remained civilians consumed approximately 8 percent more food during the war years than in prewar years, we were willing to consume even more. These factors prohibit any thoughts of large-scale reduction in food production next year.

There is another important reason why we must plan for an abundant production. A large part of the world's population outside of the United States was undernourished before the war. Now, in these areas, with much of the productive equipment destroyed by war, the need for food is great. We have promised to extend help to these devastated areas and we intend to keep that promise.

With our productive plant geared for close to full production, what and how much will we have to eat in 1946? In general, the outlook is good. However, before I review the prospects for the major food groups, I wish to emphasize that the yardstick for the measure of adequacy is relative. In each of the war years we consumed more meat than in prewar years but the wartime supplies appeared far less adequate. The explanation is the higher level of wartime incomes. When earnings are low the demand for food is low. As incomes increase so does the demand for food. A family with an annual income of \$5,000 normally eats twice as much per person as does a family whose income is less than \$500 a year. Therefore, in judging the adequacy of prospective food supplies in 1946, it is necessary to make some predictions concerning the level of income. I have assumed that although the food purchasing power of our civilian population may decline somewhat from the 1945 peak, it will be maintained at a level which will permit the great majority of us to purchase the kinds and quantities of food needed for good diets.

Meat always seems to occupy the number 1 spot in a series of predictions and I shall follow the accepted pattern. For 1946 as a whole, meat supplies generally should be sufficient to meet demand. Per capita civilian supplies

are expected to average about 150 pounds. This is a far cry from the 110 pound rate of this summer. Top quality beef roasts and steaks may not be piled high in your butcher's meat counter. However, for the next several months we will have more bacon, hams, and center-cut pork chops than in the recent past.

Fresh and frozen fish, another main-dish item, will be more plentiful in 1946 and the trend toward larger marketings in frozen form is expected to continue. More canned fish for civilians too. In the last half of the year there should be a noticeable improvement in supplies of canned salmon--an item that really went to war when our fighting men moved overseas.

And now, the traditional item around which the Sunday dinner is planned--poultry. 1946 supplies of chicken should be at least as large as those of this year. However, more chicken should be available in and around New York City; and likewise in other areas that in 1945 were so directly affected by the set-aside orders designed to furnish adequate supplies to the military. Also, we can foresee no shortage of turkeys.

I must admit that I was somewhat less than accurate in my estimate as to the supplies of eggs for 1945 when I spoke to you last year. I not only did not predict the scarcities that occurred, I hinted at a surplus. The errors underlying that prediction were two: First, at that time we did not expect that at any time in 1945 civilian meat supplies would drop below an annual per capita rate of 125 pounds. A more serious error, however, was the underestimation of our ability to eat eggs. In 1944, our consumption averaged 350 eggs per person, approximately 50 more per person than before the war. Surely civilians could not be expected to eat many more than 350 eggs per person in 1945, we argued, there would probably be too many eggs. But we were wrong. Americans, famed for their ability to eat one out of house and home, this time ate us out of eggs--390 for each person in the country, and still that wasn't enough.

While I have gained new respect for our egg-eating ability, I will again predict plentiful supplies of eggs for civilians in 1946 and the possibility of more than the market can handle during the months of peak seasonal production.

Milk production in 1946 is expected to be maintained at close to the record 1945 level, and civilian supplies will be larger. Although recently fluid milk supplies have been short during the period of low seasonal production, adequate supplies are expected in 1946. With the exception of butter, supplies of manufactured dairy products also are expected to be reasonably well in line with demand. With civilian demand for whole milk products remaining at a high level in 1946, there is little prospect for the substantial increase in butter production needed for a return to prewar consumption levels.

Civilian supplies of fats and oils will increase in 1946, although they may not be large enough to fully meet demand in the first half of the year. You may ask, in view of this, why were rationing controls eliminated? Although supplies may, at times, be smaller than demand, the disparity is not expected to be great enough to justify the cost of rationing-- in dollars, in hours and in effort--to the Government, to the distributive trade, and to household and commercial users. This is particularly true since the elimination of meat rationing would have required the establishment of a completely new rationing system for fats and oils alone.

Furthermore, controls will be continued to insure equitable distribution of fats and oils between the various classes of civilian users. During the entire period of rationing, use of oils by shortening margarine, and salad oil manufacturers has been limited to a percentage of past use under War Food Order 42. These controls will be continued. In addition, the Department of Agriculture has amended WFO 42 to require manufacturers to continue to package

approximately the same proportion of their total supplies in household, industrial and institutional size packages.

Supplies of fruits and vegetables are difficult to predict far in advance. Highlights on the fresh fruit side for 1946 are: the abundant supplies of citrus, more bananas and pineapples, and the scarcity of apples until next fall. Canned citrus segments, another war casualty as far as the civilian market was concerned, will be back in 1946 along with extremely large supplies of canned citrus juices. Larger supplies of canned deciduous fruits will be available in the last half of the year.

On the vegetable side, abundance is the word for both fresh and canned items. Only a few canned vegetables, such as asparagus and whole tomatoes, may be somewhat scarce in the first half of the year.

In order to end these commodity predictions on a sweet note, I have withheld any remarks upon sugar until now. But, for sugar, there is little hope for an early end to rationing. We scraped the bottom of the world sugar barrel this year. However, the supply picture for the whole of 1946 is better than that for 1945. Domestic production this year is larger than in 1944, larger 1946 crops are expected in the Caribbean, stocks in Java may contribute to the world supply, and European beet sugar production should improve. The sugar barrel is being slowly refilled and civilian supplies in this country should show real improvement when the larger 1946 crops are available for distribution in this country.

All in all, the food supply picture for the coming year is bright. Larger quantities of our favorite foods and an overall supply sufficient to more than meet minimum nutritional requirements. We will be well fed in 1946.

Before closing, I should like to mention briefly three developments in the food field that seem to me to be particularly important in our peacetime job of maintaining a profitable farm economy and improving the diets of our people. The first is the effort the Department of Agriculture is making to intensify its activities in connection with the fuller and more effective utilization of foods available in relative abundance.

The very nature of food production results, even in times of overall scarcities, in large seasonal surpluses of some perishable food items. The Department of Agriculture has always tried to avoid large-scale food waste and the war has sharpened our sense of such waste. When good food is left to rot in the field or diverted to emergency nonfood uses, everyone suffers. Commodities needed for good diets never become food; distributors suffer losses through sharp price declines, and farmers do not get a full return for their labors.

In the period immediately preceding the war, we became increasingly aware that, in many instances, seasonal surpluses might be avoided. When Texas farmers found cabbage prices too low to cover harvesting costs, retail stores in many sections of the country had little cabbage for sale and prices were high. Something was wrong, farmers had too much and consumers too little. The solution seemed to be one of all-out promotion of abundant foods or at least promotion commensurate with the need. To do this, Agriculture solicited the cooperation of the people who knew the job of food promotion best--the food distribution trade.

Information on abundant foods is made available to distributors and consumers alike through the National, State, and local associations of wholesalers and retailers and through the press, radio, and other informational services. The

some 200 Local Food Distribution Advisory Committees of the Department of Agriculture will perform one of the most important jobs in the promotion of abundant food. These local Advisory Committees—composed of wholesalers, retailers, butchers, and bakers—have done an excellent wartime job and have made immeasurable contributions to the success of the Nation's food program.

Their job in peacetime is equally important. These are the people with the know-how and the intimate knowledge of conditions in their local areas. They will work with other local distributors to increase purchases and use of abundant food. We will depend upon these Committees for the constructive criticisms and new ideas so necessary to any successful merchandising program.

Frequently, temporary surpluses are of a nature or are so large that efforts to promote increased purchases through normal trade channels are not enough. In these cases, the Department may step in and purchase supplies in order to keep prices from falling too low and to keep foods moving to the market place. Under the Direct Distribution Program, foods that have been acquired under Government purchase programs are made available for use in school lunch programs to charitable institutions, and to certain low-income groups.

Let me briefly illustrate the work of the Direct Distribution Program. When the hurricane struck in the Northeastern section of the country in 1944, thousands of bushels of apples were blown from the trees. If these apples were to be saved, and if farmers were not to suffer severe financial losses, they had to be moved quickly. There wasn't time to send them through normal trade channels. If the Government stepped in to purchase would an outlet be available? Yes, through Direct Distribution, these apples could be used immediately in schools and in charitable institutions. Over 1 million bushels of good apples, that could have been lost from our food supply, were included in the meals served in many schools and institutions.

Thus, the Direct Distribution Program provides for the utilization of foods that might otherwise go to waste and has a far-reaching effect upon the dietary habits of the recipients through the introduction of foods which do not ordinarily appear in the diet. With our farm plant geared to produce one-third more than in prewar years, we must widen our domestic market for food. Direct Distribution, by furnishing commodities to low-income groups and to school lunch programs, will help to increase the consumption of many important food commodities.

The School Lunch Program has a two-fold purpose: (1) to help widen our farm markets, and (2) to give growing active children the kind of food they need regardless of their ability to pay. Food facts learned at the midday school meal are carried home along with the lessons in the 3 R's. When children are introduced to fruits, vegetables, and milk for lunch they will soon notice and question the absence of these items on the family supper table.

During the 1944-45 fiscal year, more than 6,600,000 children in schools and child care centers were served midday lunches under this program. This year we expect a larger participation with an increase in the number of schools serving the Type A lunch--a complete meal furnishing from one-third to one-half of the child's daily nutritive requirements.

The strides that we have made on the domestic food front under wartime handicaps indicate that an even better job can be done in the future. The war has demonstrated that our farmers are able to produce and our people are willing to consume the kinds and quantities of food needed for adequate diets. There is no need for starvation in the midst of plenty. We can not let it happen again in this country for we must demonstrate to the world that an economy of abundance is more than an idle dream.